

The Woman Part I & II

She was an orphan, living on her own since the age of 9. She had grown accustomed to learning to care for herself. After all, before her parents were killed, she was their whole world, but she also had learned to help them around the house, in the garden, and in the pastures with the livestock. She was grateful for all they had taught her, but a young girl of 9, trying to live on her own, just wasn't going to pay the bills. There was no government help back in those days and she wondered around the dusty town trying to resolve her money problems.

But that was 9 years ago, she was now a young woman of 18 and very self-sufficient. She had discovered a way to support herself, a way to make it through this rollercoaster called life. It was a day like any other day, and she had some errands to run. She woke up alone in her bed again and prepared her breakfast over the open flamed firepit in the kitchen area of her simple abode. The other people in town were already outside hustling and bustling. Mornings were always the busiest time of day, women working to get homes prepared for another day before the noon sun rose hot overhead, men already working in the fields and getting the farm animals settled in for another day of work. But she took her time, staring out her window, watching as husbands and wives took care of their children and children took care of their chores. She felt alone at these moments, wondering what life would have been if her parents were still alive and wondering what her childhood would have been like if she would have had them past age 9.

The marketplace was also busy in her little town, she could hear the negotiations and exchange of money for bread, meat, and household goods. She didn't enjoy going to the marketplace, the people in her town knew her well, they had known her story of her growing up, but now they would glare at her, a single woman, without respect. She wasn't married and didn't have any offspring; she was not living the life that was considered normal for woman her age in those days.

So, she avoided most crowded places and started her chores later in the day when the hubbub had died down and the glares, sneers and off-handed comments were less from her community. At noon she decided it was time to go and get water for the day, so to Jacob's well she walked. She put on her cotton dress and shawl, wrapped her hair as well and headed down the dusty empty path to draw water for the day. Most of the woman would have already made it home by the time she even left her house, and the herdsmen would have also vacated the well by the time she got there, having drawn water for the livestock much earlier and later in the day. So, she traversed the walkway that led to the source of life for all those who lived in Sychar, a suburb of Samaria.

As she was balancing the empty pot on her head navigating the well beaten path, thoughts of her actions bounced in her head. She had slept with another man last night, he paid fairly for her services, but she was disappointed that this was the way she paid for her lifestyle. She didn't even remember his name but had given him everything a wife would give to a husband. He didn't stay to daybreak, none of the men she provided services to did. They always left before the sun was up, maybe they had wives to get home to and most certainly had livestock and chores early morning to attend to. What else was she to do? This had been her lifestyle for a few years and the townspeople knew her story, they knew her actions and they knew how to cast judgment for what she was – a harlot. The sun felt hotter the more she thought of her lifestyle. The thoughts of embarrassment and frustration started to produce tears welling up in her eyes as she approached the well she would draw water.

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She was so engrossed in her own thoughts, her own past actions, her own history, that she didn't notice the man sitting by the well, himself alone. His voice broke the silence and interrupted her train of destructive thought. "Give me a drink", he said. At these words she glanced and saw a Jew sitting there, this startled her even more than the sound of his voice, why would a Jew speak to her, a Samaritan? Stumbling with her thoughts to form a reply, she asked the question that was top of mind and blurted out, "How is that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" Was this man just looking for a goodtime, had he heard about her dealings with the men in her own town and wanted something more from her than just a drink? Was he thirsty for physical attention or was he being serious and really defiling his own Jewish custom by speaking with her.

The man heard the harshness in her voice, he heard the pain of years of decisions in her tone, but he didn't reply in the same harshness or roughness that she was accustomed to by the men, and women, in her own town when they spoke with her. Rather, the man said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

She rolled her eyes as he finished his sentence, "What was this man talking about?" she thought to herself. "He doesn't even have a bucket to draw from and yet he is going to give me water?" She wondered if the man knew of a place where living water existed, and she wouldn't have to let her bucket down the well. Afterall, living water, or spring water, was easier to capture than having to come here every day and draw from a deep hole in the ground. Her thoughts that were once focused on self, drew now to this strange man asking strange questions. She, being the personable woman she was, she inquired, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and livestock?"

The man smiled, his eyes sparkled with an excitement, for the woman was engaged in conversation with him. He replied, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Eager to not have to hide from the judgmental glances of other woman who knew she was a prostitute and not having to dodge the advances of men that knew the same, this woman was excited to think that maybe she wouldn't have to make the journey to this well and pressed on with her own questions. "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

But the man didn't answer that question, he needed her to understand something deeper than Jacob's well and to understand something more amazing than the quenching desire of cool water on a hot day. So, he said, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

Her inquisitive eyes changed at this statement. Her face countenance fell from curious to sorrow. She shook her head in disbelief at the man's words. She thought, "Why does he need me to bring my husband here, what point is that?" She was about ready to end the conversation, not wanting to engage in the aftermath of where her life choices had led her. So, she simply said, "I have no

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husband”. The man quickly replied, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband...”

Again, she felt her stomach fall heavy, her throat grows tight, her eyes wide in amazement at what this man spoke. She wanted the conversation to change.

Her eyes darted toward the ground, then back at the man at the well, then back down on the ground. Her thoughts raced, her heart pounding, her stomach turning. Who is this man, what does he want, why won't he just let me draw from the well in peace? Her thoughts dug deeper and deeper into inquisitiveness.

Her past experiences of pleasure which she had hoped to keep as hidden as possible, were now beaming down on her as did the noon-time sun. Her trembling hands grabbed the rope that was connected to the bucket tighter and tighter. Images of men paying for her services, glances of woman in displeasure of how she earned her daily bread, danced in her mind. How could this man possibly know of her darkest secrets and bring them to the light of day so easily?

She collected herself and her thoughts, she was a great conversationalist and decided to press on with this man at the well. She said, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” Perhaps she hoped to redirect the questioning, she knew that speaking to, let alone serving, a Jew was greatly frowned upon by both of their peoples, so she continued with her needed distraction; “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and the Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

Her lips curled in a smile at the end of her statement, proud of herself. Surely this would produce anger in this man or at least redirect the conversation away from her life and broaden it into the political-religious murmurings that had gone on for seeming generations. She had been around many religious men in her career choice, she had heard the Samaritan men she had laid with talk about Mount Gerizim being the place worthy of the temple of God, not the city of Jerusalem like the Jews claimed. She sensed that the man she was talking to now, however, was not responding in the way she anticipated. She turned her head half-cocked and the smile that had drawn across her face started to broaden. Why wasn't this man getting angry? She had just thrown at him the best insult of the day and yet here he was, peaceful.

As she started to draw the bucket back up from the depth of the well, Jesus broke the silence. “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

At these words, the bucket stopped its accent. Her eyes started to well up in tears once again. What was this man really saying? Was there something more to worship than the location that was deemed as holy by the religious leaders? This idea of something more to worship was something she had always considered but something she had certainly never heard and something her heart skipped a beat when the words fell onto her ears. Jesus was telling her that all people will worship differently than what was ever experienced before. The silence was palpable, you could only hear the silence of the countryside and the rope squeaking on the

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wooden rod that housed the pulley system, waiting for her to either continue drawing from the well or release her grip and let the bucket fall back into the watery grave below.

With brokenness in her voice, she murmured, “I know the Messiah is coming...”. She knew there would be salvation, she had waited for grace all her life. She had clung to the promise that the Messiah would return to redeem and restore everything for her people. The Samaritans called their Messiah, Taheb, which simply meant “to return”. They had waited as eagerly as the Jewish people, but the strife between the religions was palpable.

She knew that when the Taheb would come, he would tell the Samaritans all things. By this the woman meant that the Taheb, the Messiah, would reveal the truth to them. Jesus had just told the woman that they, the Samaritans, worship what they do not know, now the woman admits that they don’t have the whole truth when it comes to the religious meanings of the role of the Taheb, the Messiah.

She was fatigued with the religious bickering that had gone on between the Samaritans and the Jews; she herself had attempted to avoid conversation with this Jewish man, but he broke all the religious traditions when he asked her for a drink, now he was breaking soil in her hardened heart against her religious upbringing. Something was springing up in her, a newness and a refreshing sense of purpose in life. She had concealed her lustful occupation because of the shame it would bring her, nay, that it brought her. But now, newness was bubbling inside her, she could feel it in her heart and in her mind. What could cause this awakening welling up inside her soul?

“Jesus said to her, ‘I to whom you speak, is he’”. He was the reason for her rejuvenation of religious excitement. He was the reason for her appetite to be reawakened, to be stirred, toward something higher and greater than Jacob’s Well and who was right and who was wrong regarding religious matters.

At this, she left her waterpot, her very reason for walking to the well that day and ran back to Samaria. She was excited, her noontime water run had turned into an evangelistic experience. Indeed, what she had heard, who she had found, at that well was certainly good news. With each pound of her foot on the dirt path as she hurried back home, she shed her shame, she shed her disgrace, she shed her dishonor because of who she had met. Her smile gleaned from ear to ear. She could hardly wait to tell people in her hometown who she had found. From shame to victory, all because she met the Son of God.